



In-Depth Case Study: “Informal institutions”



Multipurpose trees and non-wood forest products, a challenge and opportunity

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Task 4.3.

The task will focus on the identification of informal norms, cultural traditions and other forms of “informal institutions” that shape the values and motivations of the actors related to NWFP provision and consumption.

[StarTree Description of Work]



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Report from the interviews in Tayside (Scotland) about wild berry picking

Research questions:

- What is the real picture of commercial wild berry picking in Tayside and in Scotland?
- What is the relationship between pickers and landowners? Is it based on the letter of the law – that the commercial picker should always ask for the permission of the landowner before picking – or is there a different way in which these relationships develop and are negotiated?



Pickers' knowledge:

- All of the interviewees pick wild berries to varying extents and between them they have a high level of knowledge of different species of wild berries and where to harvest them.
- Some had an impressive level of knowledge about particular berries. Both of the manufacturers/processors knew a huge amount about the berries they used in their products.



Forest management:

- The consensus was that there are no active management practices taking place for the purpose of increasing crops of wild berries other than a landowner leaving brambles deliberately and a few recent deliberate wild berry plantings on council developments.
- Conservation objectives such as wider biodiversity may be inadvertently helping, as is “neglect” or “not tidying up”. Some berry species (e.g. elder, bramble) are seen by traditional land managers as “weeds” which should be removed.
- Private land management was reported by many interviewees as often being hostile to wild berry production.



What pickers are like:

- Six out of 9 interviewees said that when they are out picking they rarely see others out picking.
- Of the people that do see picking, the general view is that they are recreational pickers, walkers or dog walkers, mainly middle aged and very rarely young British people or families
- Commercial berry pickers were not mentioned as most of the interviewees were unaware of any commercial picking activity. The commercial distributor just said his pickers were “*from all walks of life*”.
- Some interviewees, mainly the land owners, tended to be much more negative about external pickers.

Regular pickers develop a sense of ownership of the resources they use



Any perceived problems?

- All the interviewees saw little or no problems with berry picking, stating that they knew or had heard of little conflict or issues.
- An issue that a few interviewees mentioned was in regards to aspect of quantities related to commercial picking and that external commercial pickers may come in and remove the whole crop or put added pressure on a resource.
- Another issue mentioned was a “territorial” one, simply people’s attitudes to someone being on the land they owned, routinely used or lived next to.
- Several interviewees thought that there were problems, not with berries, but with mushrooms, either that people were harvesting too much or that there are bad harvesting practices



Asking the landowner's permission:

- Landowner permission etiquette seems to be a debatable issue; none of the recreational pickers interviewed ask for permission and the commercial pickers in some cases do and others don't.
- Most pickers raised the point that it was difficult to find out who the landowner is.
- One of the commercial pickers also found that it is not always to their advantage to ask for permission in advance because they were most likely to get a negative response. Instead, if they started picking in a careful manner the landowners would realise that they weren't doing anything bad. The same picker had very good relationships with some landowners, developed over a number of years.



Traditions:

- There was no mention of traditions associated with berry picking other than that the tradition of foraging has been lost.
- Some interviewees talked of the knowledge being passed down through generations and of picking with their families as children, and said that it was now rare to see children picking with their parents.
- The interviewees have a good level of ecological knowledge, however very little of it is strictly traditional. Several were explicit that they are actively learning foraging and ecological knowledge as adults.



Further exploration:



A case for a Delphi study?



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